

Comparison of Teaching Practices in English Writing Classrooms of Secondary School Certificate and General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level

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Abstract

This paper explores the comparison of teaching practices in English language classrooms of Secondary School Certificate and Ordinary level for the development of writing skills. The school systems offering both streams concurrently were selected in the sample. The sample of the study included the teachers of private schools of Lahore teaching at SSC and O level. Data was collected through questionnaire to determine the teaching practices used by teachers in English language classrooms. The results showed that there is difference between the use of teaching practices at SSC and O level. Findings revealed that teachers of O level have the teaching practices which involve their students in the process of writing i.e. brainstorming, group work, presentation, question-answer and extensive reading. They also use reference books, magazines, and pictures to involve their students in the process of writing to enable them to become proficient writers. On the other hand, teachers of SSC use the teaching practices which emphasized rote memorization and this is very common in Pakistani system of education. Teachers used to give written feedback on students' work to attain the writing learning outcomes. Moreover, at SSC level, examination is based on textbook. Classroom practices used by teachers are based on examination pattern i.e. use of textbook and help books. Consequently, O level students have better skill of writing as compared to SSC Students.

Keywords: Teaching practices, English writing, English writing classrooms, Secondary education

Introduction

Writing is communication with others, write to others and read others text. It has great contribution in students' personal, educational and professional field because power of effective communication convinces a reader about something. The Nation's report card (2012) defined writing as purposeful act of communication undertaken in a variety of environments. Widdowson (1978) defined writing as the grammatical system of the language. By practicing writing the abilities of concentration and focus can be developed

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in students that fosters their ways of thinking. Similarly, Successfulness of all the academic subjects depends on good writing skills.

English is a compulsory subject for all the students of SSC and O level in Pakistan. Some private schools in Pakistan offer both SSC and O level certificates according to the demands of their students. Secondary school students in Pakistan take SSC or O level for secondary level exit examination. The curriculum of English for O level develops learners' skills in creative thinking and ability to solve problems. Through this curriculum learners attain both practical skills and theoretical knowledge. The aims of the O-level curriculum of English are to enable candidates to communicate with clarity, relevance, and accuracy (University of Cambridge, 2017). Similarly, SSC curriculum aimed to develop writing with fluency and accuracy with generating and organizing ideas with appropriate grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, style, tone, spelling and vocabulary for different purposes and audiences. National curriculum 2006 recommended teaching practices in curriculum of SSC i.e. discussion, role play, inquiry, cooperative learning, projects and presentations (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

This study focuses on teaching practices of English at SSC and O level for the development of writing skills. The literature revealed that teaching practices play a vital role in developing writing skill. Comparing and investigating relevant teaching practices in different settings help in attaining the students' learning outcomes. Teaching practices includes the knowledge and skills in order to make teaching effective. It represents the teachers' wisdom in accordance with their teaching practice (Carrington, Deppler, & Moss, 2010). It is considered the art and science of arranging knowledge so that it may easily be grasped into a continuous process (Berstein, 2000). Teaching practices are not only related to particular skills of the concerned teachers but also a continuous process of interpretation and presentation of students' work towards the attainment of learning outcomes. Although this practice includes teacher, curriculum, students and suitable learning environment but teachers have a key role in teaching and learning process.

There are various ways to teach writing but the best way is practicing writing by going through the writing process i.e. planning, revising and editing (Wattam, 2016; Hyland, 2004; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Sovik & Flem, 1999). Graham and Perin elaborated that prewriting practice helps in generating text which leads to drafting and revising as widely recognized through research evidence. Translating involves these ideas in the form of words and sentences. Last step i.e. revising is concerned with correcting errors from the written text for improving writing with appropriate voice.

First stage of writing i.e. generating ideas, teachers can develop this through brainstorming. White and Arndt (1991) recommended the use of WH questions for effective writing i.e. who? What? Where? When? Why? how? As a good practice to generate ideas. This is based on the concept of 'socratic dialogue' used for generation of ideas along with developing creativity in the learner. Editing is the last step in writing

process. Getting meanings clear with accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Process approach is non-traditional approach and not used at SSC level for developing writing skills in Pakistani classrooms.

Literature proves that some practices are more effective than others depending upon the level of students and the intended learning outcomes. Teachers have to select the relevant and appropriate teaching practices according to the interest and level of students. Alexander and Currie (1998) researched the effective practices in teaching writing to attain learning outcomes at secondary level. They identified the teaching practices i.e. jotting down ideas, work in pair or group, modelling (imitate the text written by expert writers) and editing are useful to develop writing learning outcomes. Jotting and planning results in good writing is useful weaker students. On the other hand, the extent of the use of redrafting and editing depends upon the need and level of students. Likewise, important teaching practices are i.e. encouraging collaborative writing in class, assigning short term goals to students in the form of assignments and projects, teaching variety of sentence combining ways i.e. simple sentence to complex sentence (Kinneavy & Warriner, 1999).

Kendall and Khuon (2006) recommended the best practices to enhance writing skills that includes writing workshop, small group instruction and thinking practices. Moreover, Students have different background, experiences and knowledge on which teacher can emphasize and design instruction. Writing instruction can be made understandable to students by providing pictures, gestures, objects, demonstration, and relevant texts to enhance writing skill; discuss about a piece of writing; and to work with a fellow, a small group and/ or the teacher. Including these practices, other practices include graphic organizers, Thinking Maps; and inquiry by providing learning opportunities. Another way to make writing lessons more interesting is to use real, concrete objects that provide students an opportunity to use their senses and facilitate writing.

Nirmala (2008) pointed out that students of Matriculation level have poor writing proficiency. Due to conventional teaching practices and limited writing practices students face problems in writing. Traditional teaching practices are being practiced due to examination oriented system. Teachers use dictated writing in classrooms and give emphasis on rote memorization. Students have little knowledge according to the principles and process of writing. They also have problems with tenses, prepositions, spelling and punctuation. They are also unaware of organization, cohesion and coherence while writing.

Shamim as described by Coleman (2010) examined that increasing demand of English in the global market has drawn attention of the curriculum developers to provide suitable resources for teaching English in Pakistan. He identified reasons for low proficiency in English as most of the classrooms are under resourced and teachers use

grammar translation method. Mostly in English classrooms teachers use Urdu to teach English in Pakistan.

Naeem (2011) researched that English writing abilities of O level students are higher than SSC. Various teaching practices were used by SSC and O level in English language classroom. At SSC level teachers focused on lecture method and grammar translation method, while at O level, activity and direct method were emphasized. However, lecture method was frequently used to teach English both at SSC and O level. Mirza, Nosheen and Nasir (1999) found that teachers of O level are better than SSC in communication skills and encourage student participation. It was also found that SSC teachers use lecture, recitation and translation methods. Teachers of O level claimed that they use recitation and discussion. Use of drill is also present at O level to some extent.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that effective writing skills can be acquired by going through the process of writing instead of memorizing content and translation that leads to the product approach. There is low proficiency of SSC students in English writing skills as compared to O level. Teachers should encourage planning, drafting, revising and collaborative writing. Teachers should provide timely feedback, allow the students to discuss ideas with their fellows and encourage enough reading to learn the techniques of writing. Role of teacher is to indulge students in learning situation for the attainment of desired learning outcomes. So, wrapping up the discussion, there is strong need to improve teaching practices pertaining to learning outcomes at SSC level for good teaching to have quality in education and to cope with the market needs of the modern world. Teaching practices being adopted in Pakistani schools at SSC and O level for English will help making key decisions for stakeholders about strengths and weaknesses of these practices adopted by teachers. By conducting this research, effectiveness of teaching practices and their effect on learning outcomes may be gauged.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to compare the teaching practices in English writing classrooms of Secondary Schools Certificate and General Certificate of Education-Ordinary level. Teaching practices used by teachers of SSC and O level were compared on three domains of writing i.e. generation of ideas, organization of ideas, language facility and conventions.

Hypotheses of the Study

Following were the hypothesis of the study:

H_{o1}. There is no significant difference between the teaching practices of SSC and O level teachers on generation of ideas regarding developing writing skills.

H_{o2}. There is no significant difference between the teaching practices of SSC and O level teachers on organization of ideas regarding developing writing skills.

H_{o3}. There is no significant difference between the teaching practices of SSC and O level teachers on language facility and conventions regarding developing writing skills.

H_{o4}. There is no significant difference between the use of resources of SSC and O level teachers regarding developing writing skills.

H_{o5}. There is no significant difference between the use of activities at SSC and O level regarding developing writing skills.

Methodology

This research is quantitative in nature. It found the teaching practices used by teachers of SSC and O level. Questionnaire for teachers was developed on Likert type scale on the use of teaching practices at SSC and O level. Questionnaire consisted of five parts i.e. generation of ideas, organization of ideas and language facility and conventions, use of resources and activities in English writing classrooms and contained 41 items. The sample of the study comprised of 24 teachers of private schools of Lahore (12 teachers from SSC and 12 from O level). Pilot testing of the instrument was made to find out its reliability. Cronbach alpha was calculated to determine the reliability $\alpha = .84$.

Findings

Teachers' responses on the use of teaching practices for developing writing skills

Data was collected through the questionnaire made by researcher on Likert type scale. Data was collected from the teachers teaching English at SSC and O level. Mann Whitney test was used to see the significance of difference of the use of teaching practices at SSC and O level. The reason of running Mann Whitney test is that for the use of some practices sample size was too small to use chi square i.e. 12 teachers of SSC and 12 of O level. Mann Whitney test is used for ordinal data to determine the significance of difference for the use of teaching practices between the two independent groups on a continuous measure (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Data is presented in the table form followed by interpretation.

Teachers' responses for the use of teaching practices for generation of ideas

Table 1

Comparison of teaching practices for 'generation of ideas'

Teaching practices	Mean Rank (SSC)	Mean Rank (O level)	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Brainstorming	9.38	15.63	-2.427	.015
Group work	9	16.00	-2.584	.010
Written clues	10.58	14.42	-1.454	.146
Assignments	11.17	13.83	-.969	.333
Presentation	8.10	15.00	-2.584	.010

Lecture	14.63	10.38	-1.609	.108
Question answer	11.71	13.29	-.665	.506
Extensive reading	13.50	11.50	-1.445	.149
Use of model text	13.38	11.63	-.627	.531
Role play	11.54	13.46	-.705	.481
Written feedback	13.54	11.46	-.743	.458
Oral feedback	13.08	11.92	-.506	.613

Table 1 shows that teachers of O level highly use brainstorming, group work and presentation as compared to SSC. They give more emphasis to these practices for generation of ideas. However, no significant difference was found for the remaining practices i.e. written clues, assignments, lecture, question answer, extensive reading, use of model text, role play, written and oral feedback.

Teachers' responses for the use of teaching practices for organizing ideas

Table 2

Comparison of teaching practices for 'organization of ideas'

Teaching practices	Mean Rank SSC	Mean Rank O level	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Group work	11.71	13.29	-.604	.546
Jumbled words /sentences	16.29	8.71	-2.765	.006
assignments /projects	11.25	13.75	-.893	.372
Presentation	11.50	13.65	-2.483	.284
Lecture	13.04	11.96	-.391	.696
Question-answer	8.70	16.12	-2.545	.006
Extensive reading	10.96	14.04	-1.101	.271
Written feedback	15.75	9.25	-2.363	.018
Oral feedback	12.58	12.42	-.061	.951

Table 2 shows that jumbled words or sentences and written feedback are highly used at SSC as compared to O level. However, teachers of O level lay emphasis on question answer practice for teaching organization of ideas. No significant difference was found for the use of group work, assignments/projects, presentation, lecture, extensive reading and oral feedback.

Teachers' responses for the use of teaching practices for language facility and conventions

Table 3

Teaching practices for 'language facility and conventions'

Teaching practices	Mean Rank SSC	Mean Rank O level	z	p
Editing	11.92	13.08	-.420	.675
Group work	12.29	12.71	-.156	.876
Written feedback	13.04	11.96	-.407	.684
Oral feedback	11.38	13.63	-.828	.408
Sentence completion	16.46	8.54	-2.897	.004
Drill	16.88	8.13	-3.123	.002
Matching exercises	15.46	9.54	-2.106	.035
Peer review	12.79	12.21	-.215	.829
Self-review	13.46	11.54	-.728	.467
Grammar	13.50	11.50	-1.445	.149
Assignments	13.50	11.50	-.749	.454
Presentation	8.79	16.21	-2.644	.008
Lecture	12.50	12.50	.000	1.000
Question answer	9.31	13.00	-1.263	.206
Extensive reading	10.58	14.83	-2.327	.016
List of words for vocabulary	13.54	11.46	-.743	.458
Punctuation	13.50	11.50	-1.048	.294
Dictation for spelling	16.29	8.71	-2.695	.007

Table 3 shows that highly used practices at SSC are sentence completion, drill, matching exercises, presentation, and dictation for spelling. On the other hand, presentation and extensive reading are the only practices that are largely used at O level classrooms compared to SSC. However, results showed that commonly used practices at SSC and O level are editing, group work, written feedback, oral feedback, peer review, self-review, grammar, assignments, lecture, question answer, list of words for vocabulary and punctuation.

Resources and material used in English writing classrooms

Table 4

Mann-whitney u-test for comparing teaching resources and material

Resources	Mean Rank SSC	Mean Rank O level	z	p
Text books	16.58	8.42	-2.895	.004
Help books	15.83	9.17	-2.376	.017
Reference books	7.25	17.75	-3.687	<.001
Hand outs	11.54	13.46	-.797	.425
Videos	9.33	15.67	-2.372	.018
Magazines/newspaper	8.83	16.17	-2.696	.007
Pictures	9.13	15.88	-2.397	.017
Worksheets	9.00	16.00	-2.483	.013

Table 4 shows that textbooks and help books as teaching resources are highly used at SSC classrooms compared to O level. On contrary, there is more use of reference books, videos, magazines/ newspaper, pictures and worksheets at O level as compared to SSC classrooms. However, there is no significant difference for the use of handouts at both streams.

Teachers' responses for the use of activities performed in English classrooms

Table 5

Activities in English writing classrooms at SSC and O level

Activities	Mean Rank SSC	Mean Rank O level	z	p
Circulates work among their fellows	15.50	9.50	-2.181	.029
Disseminate classical writing with whole class	9.58	15.42	-2.074	.038
Ask students to make presentations	12.08	12.92	-.304	.761
Places writing on bulletin board	13.58	11.42	-.895	.371
Posts writing on web	9.25	15.75	-2.305	.021

Table 5 shows that at SSC level students share each other's work among their fellows. This activity is highly used at SSC. However, highly used activities at O level are disseminating excellent work of students with the whole class and posting students' writing on the web. Results showed that the common activities at SSC and O level are students' presentation and posting their writing on the bulletin board.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to compare the teaching practices of SSC and O level students for the development of writing skills in English language classrooms. Findings of the study showed better use of teaching practices used by teachers of O level in English writing classrooms. Teachers of O level largely use brainstorming, group work and presentation for generating ideas regarding developing writing skills as compared to SSC. Khan (1999) also found that brainstorming is useful practice for developing writing skill. Similarly, Lloyd, Blaus, and Sousa (2017) and Hyland (2004) discussed that group work is fruitful practice for generating ideas in the process of writing. Naeem (2011) elaborated that it is important for teachers to develop presentation skills in students for learning language. However, there is no significant difference for the use of teaching practices at SSC level regarding generation of ideas.

Teachers of SSC highly use jumbled words or sentences and give written feedback to students for organizing ideas as compared to O level. Widiningrum (2013) found that jumbled words can be used to teach writing to students of low proficiency. Likewise, teachers of SSC also give feedback on students' work, consistent with Bibi (2002). On the other hand, teachers of O level use question answer for organization of ideas. The finding of the study supports Chandio, Khan, and Samiullah (2013) and Naeem (2011) who considered that teachers should ask questions to make students active in classrooms. It also increases the understanding level of students in the subject of English.

For developing language facility and conventions, there is more use of sentence completion exercises, matching exercises, drill, and dictation for spelling at SSC classrooms compared to O level. Teachers of SSC consider these practices important for improving writing skills, consistent with Naeem (2011). Korhonen (2010) believed that drill is essential for learning of spelling. On the other hand, extensive reading is the only practice highly used at O level classrooms. Moore (2014) and Lloyd, Blaus & Sousa (2017) stated that indeed extensive reading is helpful for developing English writing skills.

Textbooks and help books as teaching resources are highly used at SSC classrooms. Teachers of SSC give importance to these two resources in English writing class rooms than teachers of O level. Ahmed (2010) and Khabbazzbashi, Khalifa, Robinson, Ellis and Mifsud (2017) found that text book is traditional method in teacher centered classrooms and used in teaching English for students of low proficiency. Literature does not give sufficient evidence for the use of help books in developing writing. However, it is possible that help book useful resource for learner of low proficiency in English language classrooms for developing writing skills. On contrary, there is more use of reference books, videos, magazines/ newspaper, pictures and worksheets at O level classrooms as compared to SSC classrooms. Nirmala (2006); Khan (1999); Ahmed (1979) examined that for active involvement of students in English

classrooms teachers should use reference books, pictures, maps, diagrams and the other visual material to make learning interesting. Highly used activity at SSC level is sharing of students' work among their class fellows. While teachers of O level disseminate excellent work of students with the whole class and post their writing on the web. Naeem (2011) found that there is sufficient use of activities at O level as compared to SSC. Khan (2011) also observed the use of activities in English writing classroom for effective teaching of writing.

There might be many other reasons for low proficiency of SSC students the one is the examination system. Although curriculum of SSC has been changed in 2006 but similar examination pattern as before does not allow teachers to attain the learning outcomes given in curriculum. Teachers prepare students to succeed in the examination. Another factor that might contribute towards the low performance of SSC students is large class size. It is difficult for teachers to handle the large classes with less duration of class timing. Some students might be unattended by the teacher. Another important factor towards low proficiency of SSC students is the reliance on only text book and help books. Therefore, they are unable to see the things in a broader context. The examination paper is based on these two sources therefore teacher do not bother to get their students involved in the extensive reading.

Conclusion

This study was sought to identify the teaching practices used by teachers in English writing classroom at SSC and O level. It has been our common observation that writing skills of SSC students are low than students of O level. Review of previous research shows that for teaching writing best practices are brainstorming, group work, presentation of students' work, questioning and extensive reading. It is evident from the data that teaching practices used at O level are better than SSC. Data shows that teachers of O level use these practices for developing writing skills. The findings of the study indicate that there is a great difference between use of material and activities at SSC and O level. Reference books, magazines, pictures, videos, worksheets are frequently used resources at O level. While teachers of SSC are confined only to textbooks and help books. The reason may be that teachers of SSC had to complete the prescribed syllabus therefore they do not use any material other than textbook. They prepare students for the examination and according to them these are the appropriate strategies for getting their students successful according to examination point of view. All the examination questions are taken from the textbooks. Creativity is totally ignored at SSC level which is necessary skill to cope with the 21st century. However, in O level examination creative essays are also given to students to assess their level of creativity

Recommendations

1. In this study data was obtained through questionnaire. Similar studies can be conducted with observation and interview data. Focus group interviews for students can be conducted for more reliable results.
2. Future studies can be conducted to know the preferences of teachers for the use of teaching practices to develop writing skills.
3. This study is carried out in the subject of English. Similar studies can be conducted for other subjects as well as on other grades.
4. At SSC level, teachers use text book as an important teaching tool. The reason is that examination is based on textbook. Almost all the questions are taken from textbook. This practice should be discouraged and unseen questions should be given in examination.
5. Teachers should give more focus on instructional practices given in curriculum for the attainment of learning outcomes.

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